

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1879

## EDUCATION

*Education, its Principles and Practice, as Developed by George Combe, Author of "The Constitution of Man."*

Collated and Edited by William Jolly, H.M. Inspector of Schools. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1879.)

THIS book appears at an opportune moment. Inquiries into the philosophy of education are attracting increased attention among teachers, and the universities are taking measures with a view to bring to light the best rules for school teaching, and the principles which underlie those rules. In these circumstances, the laborious editor of this volume has done a public service, in placing on permanent record and in a modern form, the principal writings of one of the most original thinkers and earnest workers in the department of educational reform. But for such an enterprise, the speculations of Combe, many of which originally appeared in a fugitive form, or in books which are now well-nigh forgotten, would have remained unknown to the present generation; although some at least of his teaching is as much needed now as half a century ago, when it first appeared.

George Combe was born in 1788, and the seventy years of his life coincided with the period in which the national conscience became awakened to the necessity for public instruction; and in which occurred the principal experiments and controversies that have slowly shaped our present national system. His attention was very early directed to the defects, both in the supply of means for education and in the character and quality of such education as was then accessible to the people. A large part of his life was devoted to the exposition and propagation of his views on these subjects. Those views may be thus briefly summarised:—(1) A true science of education should be based on a knowledge of physiology and of mental philosophy. (2) School teaching should be mainly directed to the training of faculties, with special reference to the actual pursuits and duties of life. (3) Hence the study of our own physical constitution, of the phenomena of nature, and of the economic and social laws which govern the happiness of communities, ought to supersede many of the subjects included in the ordinary school routine, much of which he regarded as mere verbiage and as very sterile of intellectual result. (4) While increased attention ought to be given in schools to ethics and religion, in so far as they are deducible from the laws of our own well-being and that of society, the public school ought not to concern itself with dogmatic theology in any form. (5) Special efforts ought to be made to train girls, both to a stronger interest in intellectual pursuits, and to a better understanding of the laws of health and the right way of training young children. (6) A true knowledge of the science of mind for the purposes of education is to be obtained only through phrenology; and the study of this subject is not only indispensable to the teacher and the parent, as the guide to right training; but should also be introduced into the curriculum of the school itself.

These cardinal doctrines were set forth by Combe in his larger works on Phrenology, and on the Constitution of Man; in numerous pamphlets and contributions to

periodicals; as well as in lectures delivered in many places, both in England and America. His writings are characterised by clearness, and by considerable wealth and variety of illustration; and by the unadorned and forcible style which comes rather from strong conviction and definite purpose than from conscious literary effort.

To bring together from many books, tracts, and reports of lectures a coherent statement of Combe's teaching was a difficult task. And in one respect his present editor has succeeded. Mr. Jolly is in full sympathy with his author, and has diligently studied his writings. He has acquainted himself with the collateral history of the chief movements in which Combe took part, and has brought down the record both of his achievements and of their results to the latest period. As one of the most energetic and thoughtful of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, and as a careful student both of the history and of the philosophy of the pedagogic art, Mr. Jolly possesses some exceptional qualifications for the task he has undertaken.

Yet, although the book is complete and exhaustive, and is logically arranged, it cannot be said to have been skillfully or artistically edited. Combe's life was spent in a sort of missionary work, in expounding and enforcing to very different audiences, and with varied illustrations, a few principles which he held to be of paramount importance. It was inevitable that he should repeat what was substantially the same thing many times. One might have expected that an editor would select from the voluminous material before him the most effective statement of each of Combe's doctrines, and present them in a concise form likely to attract a modern reader. But Mr. Jolly has preferred to bring together lengthy extracts, and to produce a huge amorphous volume of 800 pages, with manifold reiteration of the same facts and speculations in every variety of form. The book is filled with cross-references, and furnishes quite a curious study of the mode in which a limited number of ideas and facts admit of being stated and restated, combined and recombined, looked at from all sides, and made to occupy the maximum of space. All Mr. Jolly's reminiscences and illustrations seem to revolve round the three or four eminent men, who have more or less adopted Combe's views, and the little group of secular schools—of which it seems that very few now survive—in which those views were most fully carried out. And the repeated reference to the same names becomes after a time not a little wearisome even to the most patient and sympathetic reader.

The book will enable this generation to estimate with tolerable accuracy Combe's true place in the history of education. On the need of scientific instruction, and of training the observant and reasoning powers by the study of natural phenomena, his teaching was much in advance of his own age. His vindication of the importance of some acquaintance with the structure and functions of our own bodies, and with the constitution of man and of society; and especially his demand that the laws affecting wages and capital, and the conditions of industrial success should be taught to children are sound and far-seeing and even now await fuller public recognition. The scant acceptance these doctrines have received from the promoters of public education is largely owing to the use of the word "secular" in connection with Combe and his

favourite schools, and to the unfortunate associations which have happened to cluster round that word. But Combe was an earnestly religious man, and in his view both natural and revealed religion were vital parts of education. He wished, it is true, to exclude controversial theology from the common school; but he strongly advocated the teaching of the Christian faith by clergy and parents at other than school hours. And in the school itself he thought that moral training—the cultivation of benevolence, reverence, and truthfulness—was indispensable. There is no one point on which his theories have been so much misunderstood. He believed that very noble incentives to duty and valuable helps in the formation of character were to be obtained from the wise study of the laws of our own being, and the structure of human society; and his chapter on “Moral and Religious Training through Science”—one of the most original and valuable in the book—is full of wise suggestions and of interesting examples. “The Ten Commandments,” he would say, “are as clearly inscribed in the nature and constitution of man as on the tables of stone delivered to Moses.” To him the revelations of Divine will and of the nature of human responsibility conveyed to us in science and in the order of nature were as sacred as the teachings of religion, were indeed a substantial part of religion itself. It must be owned that this is a doctrine which has not met with universal acceptance, and the exposition of which in Combe’s writings is yet deserving of study. And in like manner his views on the training of children for the duties of citizenship, on a more rational system of teaching for girls, and on the necessity for instructing the teachers of the people in the art and mystery of their profession, were generally right and often profound; and possess hardly less value for this generation than for his own.

Yet it must be admitted that although Combe saw clearly and expounded forcibly some useful truths, he was not distinguished by much breadth of vision; and he certainly did not excogitate a full or philosophical system of education. He believed it possible by pure deduction to evolve a practical scheme from certain scientific principles; and there is evidence throughout the whole of his writings that he attached too little value to the lessons of actual experience, and that a fuller knowledge of child-nature, and of the practical working of schools would have rectified many of the deductions to which he attached most importance. He habitually depreciates the study of language, and repeatedly contrasts what he calls “real” knowledge with linguistic study, to the disparagement of the latter. To him words were mere means of expression and of communication. He never recognised the truth that words are the instruments as well as the representatives of thought; and that the right study of words and their relations is a discipline in logic and one of the most effective means of widening the range of a pupil’s intelligence. Nor in his scheme of study was there much room left for history, for poetry, or for literary culture in any form. “*Res, non verba, quæso*,” was his favourite motto; yet it is not too much to say that his conception both of things and of words and of the part they should play in education was inadequate and unsound. And as to his system of phrenology, which he had learned from Spurzheim, and from which he hoped so

much as an instrument for the regeneration of society, we must admit that it is now universally discredited by men of science; and that it betrayed Combe into a false method of psychological analysis. He believed that every separate moral propensity or mental gift had its own *habitat* in the brain, and was capable of being separately handled and developed. He thought that it would be enough to show a child that he was deficient, *e.g.*, in the organ of veneration, and then to set him to cultivate that faculty by placing before him appropriate objects for its exercise, and so to restore the balance of his character. Experience however has not confirmed this theory. It may well be doubted whether character has ever been fashioned in this conscious and mechanical way. At all events it does not appear even in this book, that the theory has ever been seriously carried out in practice; or that any one even of Combe’s most enthusiastic disciples has accepted it as a working hypothesis, or applied it with success in the government, either of a school or of a home. There can be little doubt that Combe’s faith in what he called phrenological science and his constant use of its terminology, vitiated many of his speculations about teaching, and prevented him from arriving at a full or satisfactory solution of the problem he desired to solve.

Few persons are better qualified than the editor of this volume to aid the public in discriminating what is ephemeral and obsolete in Combe’s teaching from that which is likely to possess permanent value. This task, however, Mr. Jolly has not achieved and has scarcely attempted. And even those who most appreciate the importance of Combe’s contributions to educational science will be fain to own that the bulk of this book is seriously disproportioned to the worth of its contents; and that a more valuable boon to the teacher’s profession, and a far worthier and more enduring memorial of Combe himself might easily have been comprised in a volume of one-third of its size.

#### THE CAPERCAILLIE IN SCOTLAND

*The Capercaillie in Scotland.* By J. A. Harvie-Brown, F.Z.S., Member of the British Ornithologist’s Union. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1879.)

THE introduction of birds into countries far from their original homes and their successful “acclimatisation” therein—to use a word now generally in vogue—is well known to have been accomplished in many instances—not always, however, to lead to the benefits expected to result from it. Thus the European house-sparrow has been transplanted to the United States of America, and is now a familiar bird of many of the great cities of the New World; the Indian grackle is at present one of the commonest birds in Mauritius, and in some of the Hawaiian Islands the native birds are said to have almost entirely disappeared in the course of their struggles for life with introduced species. But the *re*-introduction of a bird into a country where it has formerly flourished and where it has only recently—almost within the memory of man—become extinct, is, so far as we know, almost an unparalleled fact, and one that is well worthy of an accurate record.

Such has been the case in our own islands with one of the finest and largest species of game birds commonly